

Tuesday

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# MSHA report blames Willow Creek explosion on mine ventilation system

Ventilation was to blame for the Willow Creek coal mine explosion that killed two people last year, according to a recently released United States Labor Department report.

Eight other underground workers were injured when the mine near Helper blew up on July 31, 2000.

Explosive methane gas built up in the mine's labyrinth of tunnels, and ventilators didn't dilute the gas well enough to prevent the series of four blasts, according to the report.

The bleeder ventilation system did not adequately control and distribute the air passing through the worked-out area of the D-3 panel.

The system did not continuously dilute and move methane-air mixtures and other gases, dusts and fumes from the worked-out area away from active workings and into a return air course or to the surface of the mine.

Several factors adversely impacted the bleeder ventilation system prior to the accident, according to the report.

An increase of coal production on the longwall face and an expanding gob resulted in greater methane liberation into the gob.

The increase in methane was accompanied by a decrease in airflow within the gob.

Although vertical degasification boreholes were drilled

for the panel, the first borehole had not yet been encountered.

In addition, the mine ventilation and bleeder system had limited reserve capacity and the availability of ventilation pressure and air quantity was further reduced by the intake air split adjacent to the D seam bleeders.

The distribution of airflow in the gob was affected by the lack of fully established internal airflow paths as well as by ventilation controls, such as check curtains and an undercast, that were left intact in the worked-out area, claims the report.

The recently released report indicated that the federal enforcement actions include two violations:

- The bleeder system being used during pillar recovery did not control and distribute air passing through the worked-out area of the underground coal production facility.

- The mine operator installed framed curtains across four of the six bleeder connectors at the in by end of the D-3 longwall pillared area.

Also, an overcast and check curtain were installed in the bleeder connector nearest the headgate side of the tailgate side of the workout area.

However, the approved plan supplement did not show controls at these locations.

The controls inhibited airflow on the headgate side of the worked-out area where the ini-

tial explosion and subsequent fire occurred.

The initial explosion was sparked by falling rock in one methane pocket.

Most likely, a roof fall in the headgate fringe area of the gob, between the longwall face and the longwall setup rooms, ignited a small pocket of methane and other gaseous hydrocarbons, according to the report.

The flame traveled the inby to methane accumulating in the back of the gob near the longwall setup rooms.

The situation resulted in the explosion and fire that occurred inside Willow Creek at 11:45 p.m. on July 31, 2000.

An interruption of ventilation of the D-3 gob, caused by the explosion, prevented methane removal from the gob.

Eventually, liquid hydrocarbons became involved in the fire.

Fatal injuries did not occur as a result of the first explosion, according to the determinations made by federal investigators.

After the first explosion, personnel remained on the longwall section to extinguish a fire near the base of the shields on the headgate side of the longwall face.

Conditions worsened in the face area just prior to the second explosion.

The fire, resulting from the first explosion, ignited subsequent explosions.

(Continued on page 2)



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## Report blames:

(Continued from page 1)

The fatal injuries likely occurred as a result of the second and third explosions at the underground coal mining facility.

"I think what we see, if nothing else, is a need for frequent and thorough examinations" of the ventilation systems near these longwall machines, said Allyn Davis, accident investigation program manager for the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration.

"Conditions can change rapidly," pointed out the MSHA.

The report concludes that the mine's ventilation system did not adequately dilute methane, dust and other gases in the mine.

Increased coal production in the mine meant more methane gas but the ventilators didn't keep up.

## Disease control agency discusses TB:

(Continued from page 1)

posed to the germs will develop a positive tuberculin skin test approximately two to 10 weeks after exposure.

People who develop a positive tuberculin skin test are infected with TB germs, but 90 will never develop the disease.

The risk for developing active TB disease is highest in the first two years after a positive tuberculin skin test, indicates the national health agency.

Some individuals are more likely than others to develop the disease after becoming infected with the bacteria.

At risk populations include individuals infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), people recently exposed to a TB disease patient and persons with certain medical conditions.

The tuberculin skin test determines whether an individual is infected with the TB germ. But the test does not tell whether a person has the disease

For the skin test, a small amount of fluid called tuberculin is injected under the skin in the lower part of the arm.

Two or three days later, a health care worker looks for a reaction on the arm.

Other screening procedures - like a chest X-ray and an examination of a sample of phlegm or mucous material from the lungs - are needed to determine whether the person has TB disease.

Individuals with TB infection may be given medications to prevent the disease from developing, indicates the national health agency.

The most commonly used drug, isoniazid (INH), is taken for six to nine months.

The decision regarding the use of preventive therapy is based on the person's age, the individual's chances of developing the disease and the patient's health care provider recommendations.

Tuberculosis disease can be cured by taking several drugs for six to nine months, adds the health agency. It is crucially important for TB disease patients to take all of the drugs exactly as prescribed. If the individuals stop taking the medications too soon or fail take the drugs correctly, the TB germs may become resistant to treatment. TB disease that becomes resistant to drugs is harder to treat.

The best way to prevent TB is to completely treat people who have the active disease, stresses the national health agency.

In most cases, local health department staff meet regularly with TB patients in directly observed therapy to ensure drugs are taken correctly.

Carbon County residents who may have been to TB disease should contact a private physician or the local health department and arrange for a tuberculin skin test.

A vaccine for TB is administered in many countries, but it is

## Actions taken in felony criminal 7th District Court for Carbon County 24 before Judge Bruce K. Hallid:

• Dennis Lee Waters - the defendant to answer a felony level criminal containing two separate second degree counts along with an additional third charge.

Pursuant to a negotiated resolution in the criminal complaint, the right to a previously scheduled hearing and the defendant pleads felony arraignment to two third degree an amended lesser included but well as the original theft charge.

The court accepted Waters' guilty tentatively set pronouncement of the defendant's third degree felony convictions on Oct. 1.

In exchange for Waters' two remaining second degree burglary retained in the felony level criminal against Waters dismissed.

• Joshua D. Border - the defendant to answer a criminal information third degree felony level unlawful use of a controlled substance and additional misdemeanor category.

The misdemeanor offenses filed included one class C speeding as well as three separate class A unlawful possession/use of a substance, one unlawfully operating on a denied drivers license and possession/use of drug paraphernalia.

Pursuant to a negotiated disposition, the defendant waived the complaint and Border pleads misdemeanor offenses, an amended class A attempted unlawful use of a controlled substance, three of the original charges, controlled substance, the class B drug paraphernalia and the class A.

Pronouncing judgment in the and class C misdemeanor conviction sentenced the defendant to 40 days in Carbon County Jail and credited incarceration time already served in connection with the case.

In exchange for the defendant's pleas, the remaining class B drug unlawfully operating on a denied drivers license offenses

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